
Your Eyes Look Like Coming Home
a Reddie fic
by NotAlone91

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Your Eyes Look Like Coming Home

Some evils are blatantly obvious; killer clowns, men in hockey masks with machetes, intergalactic space tyrants. They have telltale indicators. Their characteristics are a blinking neon sign that reads "Beware! No Good Can Come From This!" Some are a little more insidious. They lurk in your daily life and permeate your entire being. Unfortunately, just because you've had a run in with the obvious doesn't make you immune to the deeper, darker ones.

Richie Tozier had dealt with both. Two weeks before Pennywise took Georgie Denbrough, he found himself climbing in through Eddie Kaspbrak's window. Not for the first time and certainly not for the last, but this time was different. It was the first time his father had brought any of his friends into the equation. It was also the first time he'd flat out called him by the same slurs Bowers and his gang had been flinging for years.

Richie had flopped back on Eddie's bed and stayed there for the duration of the hours since he'd started throwing rocks at his window. "God, I hate them," he groaned.

"No, you don't," Eddie said softly, resting his head back against the side of his bed. He knew Richie was right. He certainly hated them himself. Still, he hated the idea that goofy, kind Richie, who might have been a crude shithead, was so affected by their cruelty that he could actually say that he hated them. He wasn't sure he'd even heard him say that he hated Bowers and his gang. Richie wasn't hateful. That's what made it so jarring.

That evening had clinched it, though. Richie had realized over Christmas that he had a crush on Eddie. Eddie, his best friend since kindergarten. Eddie, the one person who could keep up with all of his jokes and jabs and metaphorical pigtail pulling. But hearing his father use both of those things so succinctly against him was too much. "Yes, I do," he assured with a humorless laugh.

He turned his head to face him, knitting his brows. "They're your parents." That didn't mean much, considering that he was talking about a man who beat the shit out of his son, making sure not to

bruise his face because that would be too difficult to have a story for, and a woman who was too drunk to care. He'd never understand how anyone could be apathetic to Richie.

"And?" Richie groaned, unaffected. He rolled onto his side and tugged at the shoulder of Eddie's shirt, trying to pull him onto the bed.

Eddie had nothing. "And…" he started, trailing off when he realized that. There was no excuse. There was no reasoning. There was no justification. Richie had every reason in the world to hate them and Eddie knew it. He lifted himself up next to him and twisted his mouth to the side, considering the whole situation.

"And I only feel at home when I'm with you," Richie said, picking at the band of his watch, unable to lift his deep brown eyes to meet Eddie's own. "Home's where you run to, not from."

Eddie's heart raced traitorously and the tips of his ears tinged pink. He couldn't for the life of him figure out why it happened like that. Why Richie made him feel so differently than anyone else. Instead of dwelling on that when his friend so clearly needed him, he decided to take a playful swipe. "So, does that make me your parent?" He made a startled, terrified face and looked off distantly. "I'm too young to be a Dad…"

Richie rolled his eyes and gave him a gentle shove, "Which would make you your own Grandfather." He pouted thoughtfully, then nodded, seemingly taking his assessment to heart. "Sounds about right," he agreed finally.

"Wait, what?" he asked, not following.

Wiggling his eyebrows over the frames of his Coke bottle glasses, Richie gave a half smile. "Since I still intend to make an honest woman of your mom."

As he stifled a laugh, he couldn't help but notice how cute he was when he was finally beginning to feel better. "God, Richie," he said, drawing out the -ie and feigning disgust. And then it hit him like a ton of bricks. He had a crush on Richie.

He absolutely could not have a crush on Richie.

"Like mother, like son," Richie laughed, unaware of the way Eddie's mind was imploding beside him, pulling the smaller boy down next to him. He was really too sore to play fight like they normally did, but from his angle, he had the advantage of fingers on bare skin, tickling Eddie as he squirmed and tried to get back up. His heart almost hammered out of his chest when Eddie stopped fighting and turned to face him, pink cheeked and breathless. There was something in his eyes that took Richie's own breath away.

"Beep beep, asshole," he said with a gasp before reaching into his pocket and pulling out his bright blue aspirator and taking a puff. He closed his eyes and tried to calm the tightness in his chest. What the fuck was he supposed to do now?

Apparently, spend the rest of the summer attached at the hip. They'd saved each other at every turn. Richie was constantly throwing himself in front of Eddie whenever danger, usually in the form of Pennywise, presented itself. They bickered and shoved and teased and remained absolutely oblivious of the other's feelings. For years, they did. Until one fateful, rain soaked day when they were freshly sixteen.

Somehow, they managed to keep their relationship to themselves. They both felt horrible keeping it from Mike, but they just couldn't. Not in Derry. Besides, they liked having it to themselves. Richie kept hearing Pennywise taunt him about his dirty little secret, but it wasn't dirty. It was the purest thing he could ever imagine. Everything between the boys came naturally once they'd allowed themselves the chance.

Even the last week of summer before their senior year. They both feared everything changing in a year's time. Little did they know…

Tink. Tink. Tink.

Stones from the Kaspbrak residence's garden rapped repeatedly at Eddie's window, barely audible above the gently falling rain, provided the telltale sign that his boyfriend was on the grass below, waiting to climb the terrace to get into his room. After two years of

dating and five years of these night time visits being a regular albeit unannounced occurrence, they had practically perfected this routine.

Eddie crossed to the window and opened it and the screen, dramatically hanging out of it, sighing. "Richie-o, Richie-o, wherefore art thou, Richie-o?" Richie rolled his eyes and huffed as he began scaling the white wood, his duffel bag, backpack, gym bag, and another ratty old Jansport backpack with Sharpie all over it slung across his body in all directions. Past his dramatic performance, his boyfriend didn't even notice the sheer magnitude of layers the boy wore. Something was clearly up and somehow, Eddie was missing it. "Deny thy father and refuse thy name-"

"Okay, I'm Richie because…" he whispered and huffed, cutting off his soliloquy and quietly climbing toward him. "Hi?" He offered his Eddie a quick peck through the open window, then flicked his eyes upward, exasperation comedically magnified by his glasses, "Who else would I be?" He lugged his upper body in the window and, aided by his still-too-long legs, managed to get inside without falling. "We've definitely got the father denying down and we'll put a pin in the name changing," he laughed, imagining a day when, maybe, he'd be Richie Kaspbrak or the smaller boy in front of him would be Eddie Tozier, feeling a familiar warmth in his chest, "but like, I've got some baggage here, babe. A little help would be nice." Aided by Eddie, he started untangling his limbs from the straps and setting the bags in a pile in the corner.

"I think the only qualifying person there would require a PHD," Eddie mused, dropping the overstuffed cinch top bag a little too loudly. Richie held his breath and counted to ten, waiting for Mrs. Kaspbrak to yell and ask if he was alright. Nothing. He exhaled and pulled his boyfriend into a warm hug. Eddie melted into the embrace, breathing him in and noticing the telltale scent of Tiger Balm, which he'd given Richie after a particularly bad fight with his dad that left him limping for days. The strength of the pungent herbal aroma indicated that it must have been a bad night. He frowned and pulled back, surveying his boyfriend a little more carefully.

Slipping into his defensive English Gentleman voice, he began shedding layers of clothing. "Indubitably! What-ho!" he said, a little too boisterously, even for Richie. His leather and denim jackets, two

hoodies, and a couple of button downs later, he was down to the t-shirt Eddie had seen him in at lunch time when they'd met at the arcade. "We do happen to have one right here in our very midst." He leaned forward and kissed him on the forehead. "Doctor! A little assistance, if you'd be so kind," he said, wincing as he tried to move his shoulder to yank his shirt off over his head.

Eddie gently slid his fingers under the hem and lifted the shirt up over his head. Shit, his mind cursed. This was the worst he'd ever seen and this had been happening for years. All of the previously healing bruises that had faded to yellow and scant were angry and purple and screamed internal bleeding to Eddie, but he tried to swallow his fear. "You know, when most couples play doctor, I don't think this is what they're talking about," he said softly, tracing his fingers over a particularly bad welt.

Richie hissed an intake of breath, resolve faltering momentarily. "Why, my good sir, I do believe you are correct," he joked, draping his arms over Eddie's shoulders. "Hi," he said, greeting his boyfriend again as he rested his forehead against his and felt the rambling begin to subside. He was here. He was safe.

Having closed his eyes, Eddie smiled and raised to his tiptoes to kiss him. "Hi," he said, voice low and tender. Then, something occurred to him. He leaned back with a sarcastic smile. "You do know that my mother isn't here and you didn't have to climb in through the window, right?"

Richie's eyes widened. "You let me climb all the way up here with all this shit on my back?" He exclaimed with a half laugh that made his side hurt.

"Hey, you were halfway up here when I heard the window," he laughed, kissing an apology. He carried on tending to Richie, making sure none of the bruises had split and that nothing was broken or bleeding.

They spent the better part of the weekend together. Richie returned to Eddie's window every evening, slept beside him every night, snuck out in the morning, they'd spend the day running around Derry with Mike or at work, then repeat the whole process over. It was the most

pleasant pattern Eddie could imagine. He couldn't help but see them spending the rest of their lives this way. Minus the sneaking.

Except, of course, the secrets. Richie was keeping something from him.

The vast majority of Richie's body was covered in bruises. Spending consecutive nights at his house was nothing new, especially since they'd gotten together. He was only minimally talkative and, when they were alone, he was extremely touchy. Not to say that he wasn't always finding little ways to touch Eddie, but he wasn't normally the type for lazy cuddling. That was more Eddie's M.O.

When they woke up Sunday morning, MTV still played on from the overnight hours. Michael Stipe's voice carried out lazily over the acoustic strum of the song, wildly popular when they'd gotten together 2 summers earlier, and Eddie, despite his worry, found himself smiling as he woke up, his face buried in Richie's neck. He pressed a kiss to his stubbled jaw to wake him up. He stirred a little, a sleep heavy hum was all the response Eddie received. Richie didn't have to work that day, so he didn't really have any reason to wake up. Eddie entered his bathroom to shower, suddenly regretting having let him sleep.

When he came back a half hour later, towel wrapped around his waist, he found his boyfriend awake and similarly undressed. Instead of his normal boxer briefs, he had on a tight pair of red briefs that highlighted his frame curiously. Eddie found himself staring as he entered the room. "Good morning, sleepyhead," he teased. Richie gave a devious smile in response that Eddie hardly noticed because-god, had Richie always been that big? "Those are…" he trailed off, tongue growing thick and dry in his mouth.

"Yours," Richie supplied, sauntering toward him, capturing his boyfriend in a languid kiss. "I, apparently, didn't have any underwear, so I stole yours."

Eddie's eyes went wide and he choked out a laugh. Seeing a hint of the normal, joking Richie, he took his shot, switching into motor mouthed hypochondria to get a rise out of him. He threw his hands up, accentuating his words with his hands. "I don't know where that

ass has been. Do you know how unsanitary th-"

Pressing himself closer to his boyfriend and knocking the towel to the floor, he draped his arms around his neck. "Eddie, my love, you know better than anyone exactly where my ass has been," he snarled, proud of his double entendre.

As he let his hands trail down to the ass in question, he rocked against his boyfriend. "That's not what I meant, shithead," he laughed.

Richie raised one eyebrow and said plainly, "Again, that would be you, babe." He leaned in and kissed Eddie, knocking him back onto the bed. He traced his hands down his boyfriend's bare chest to the space below his navel.

"Fuck," Eddie hissed, glancing at the clock on his bedside table. He reached up and pulled Richie down on top of him, their lips crashing together. He felt himself stir to life and moaned into his mouth.

"And be late for work?" Richie teased, parting their lips slightly. "Wouldn't that exacerbate the current situation?"

Propping himself on his elbows, Eddie hooked a finger into the elastic waistband. "If it gets you out of my underwear, no," he said, leaning in next to the boy's face and tugging his earlobe into his ljps.

"I mean, if you insist," Richie said. He rose to his knees, one on either side of Eddie's waist, pinning his hands above his head easily with just one of his own. The other moved instinctively to Eddie's neck. He felt him writhing beneath him and smiled. Eddie managed to wriggle one of his hands free and slid it between his warm skin and the fabric, then attempting to slide them down. Richie tutted his tongue and readjusted them. He slid his mouth down his boyfriend's neck and sucked down on his collarbone.

Eddie's breath hitched and he faltered. He couldn't say no to anyone who made him feel like this. "Okay, alright, fine," he grumbled. "What's mine is yours." Pleased with himself, Richie eased off of his boyfriend and pulled out a pair of dark jeans from one of his bags. Silently, Eddie watched as he worked them on, marvelling at the way

his boyfriend had developed over time. It was so strange to think that this was the same gangly kid he used to fit in the hammock in the clubhouse with. They could probably still fit, but Eddie would just about have to lay on top of Richie. He thought about that briefly and decided that, maybe, they should give it a go one day soon. They dressed together in a hurry, racing to beat the time when Mrs. Kaspbrak would wake up and start trying to get in to 'help' Eddie. When they had finished, they sat against the wall under the window for a moment. Richie really just wanted to stay like this that day. "Will I see you again tonight?" Eddie asked, leaning against his shoulder and linking their fingers together. Richie responded with nothing but a nod. They let the silence envelop them for a moment before Eddie got jittery and spoke once more. "You do realize that you haven't been home in 4 days, right? I mean, I'm in no way shape or form complaining, but…" he trailed off, eyeing Richie carefully. He knew something was up, he just needed him to tell him now. "is everything okay?"

Thinking it over for a while, he finally decided that, no, now was not the time. Maybe later on tonight. "That depends on what you mean by okay." He boosted himself from the floor with a groan, the bruise over his tailbone still giving him grief, and crossed to the TV, turning off the syndicated rerun that was playing empty in the background.

"Richie…" Eddie said quietly, watching his boyfriend pace erratically. "I haven't pushed because I figured you'd open up to me eventually, but this has been all weekend." He rose, himself, and took Richie's hands in his, moving so that he had no option but to look at him. "What's up?" he asked, concern playing the corners of his mouth into a slight frown.

For about a second, he almost told him. Instead, he took a deep breath and clamped his mouth shut. He couldn't do it. It would make Eddie worry too much. He wasn't quite feeling better about it all yet and, as much as he loved and appreciated his boyfriend's care, he still hated seeing the way he would let himself get worked up over it too. "It's nothing." Richie gestured back to the tv with his head and put his hands on Eddie's hips, imitating the character on the show he'd just turned off. "It's dy-no-miiiite."

Eddie didn't buy it. Not even a little bit. He cocked his head to the

side and repeated his name as gently as he could. "Rich."

The look. Not the look, Richie's whole being begged. He was powerless against that look that Eddie would give him. He shook his head and looked at a point above the boy's head. "It's nothing," he assured, only to be met head on by Eddie's sweetly imploring gaze. Richie struggled to find the words. "It's…" he trailed off, cursing himself for being, once again, unable to keep anything from Eddie, "fuck." He took a step back and shook out his limbs, preparing himself. "Okay. You know how, a long time ago, I said you were the only time I ever felt at home?"

A smile lingered on his face for the briefest moment as he closed the distance between them in a hug, resting his head against Richie's chest. "Vaguely," he lied. Of course he remembered. It may have been ages ago, but you don't exactly forget the moment you realize you have a crush on your best friend. Especially when it turns into a nearly two year relationship that you're planning on being in forever.

"Well, it would seem that's true now more than ever," Richie said, voice low, slightly muffled by Eddie's hair as he rested his cheek against the top of his head.

His hands played at the edges of Richie's orange plaid button down. He knew something was up. "It wasn't 'just' a bad beating, was it?" he asked, remembering how many times he had said it was "just" that, that he was "just" sore, that he "just" didn't feel like going back.

A deep breath filling his lungs, Richie knew he had to get it out. Eddie needed to know. He couldn't keep it from him anymore. "No," he admitted. No turning back, Tozier. "They finally did it. The nightly ritual started and I snapped." He admitted and stepped back, sitting on Eddie's bed, fumbling at a loose stitch at the bottom of the comforter, directing his gaze at it, knowing if he looked at his boyfriend, he'd end up in tears and he did not want that. They didn't deserve his tears. Eddie knelt in front of him, hands gently resting on Richie's thighs. "I grabbed him by the ankle and laid him out flat. That turned into a wrestling match. I went for the face because I knew he wouldn't." Richie rolled his eyes.

His father, ever the pragmatic abuser, knew that if no one could see

the bruises on his son, they wouldn't really question it. The worst part, for Richie, was that he'd always find an excuse for any injury he sustained, so it really didn't matter where they bruise was. The time he'd thrown Richie down the stairs and he'd wound up with a split lip and a massively swollen wrist, he told the losers he'd dumped his bike into a ditch while staring at a Kim Lister. Eddie hadn't bought that for a second, but wasn't going to push back then, especially when the rest of the boys, save Ben, of course, had delved into a raucous discussion surrounding Kim and her legs and her smile and her ass.

Richie rubbed absently at his still scraped knuckles, bringing himself back into the moment. "I wanted people to see. Then, he made some cruel remarks that were way over the line and my mouth went haywire."

Eddie didn't have to imagine what sort of things were said. The boys weren't out to anyone but each other, but each of them had had more than their fair share of slurs and jabs over the way people perceived them. Somehow, it never bothered Eddie much. Call it the hypochondria, but he'd had bigger things to worry about. The biggest 'gay panic,' as Richie had phrased it, that he'd had was realizing that it was Richie he felt that way about. And it was mainly just the fact that he'd been so shocked by it. Even as he'd spent that first weekend in a mental tizzy, it was because he couldn't believe he hadn't realized it before, followed by the frustration that, of course, he would fall for the one loser he was sure would never feel that way about him. Even still, he struggled with what Richie could possibly see in him. But Richie… Richie tucked it all away, pushing the parts of himself that screamed gay, and there were plenty, into a tiny box that sank his stomach like a lead weight.

"Years worth of pent up bullshit came spewing out of me and I didn't have the energy to hold back anymore," he explained. "I let it all fly." He stared at the ceiling for a moment, blinking back tears and trying to banish his mother's face from his memory. "And then she decided to get involved, having been ripped out of her drunken stupor, and suggested that he either kill me or kick me out so she wouldn't have to hear it anymore." He could still smell the gin seeping out of his mother's pores. He knew his father had the tendency to treat his

mother the same way as he did Richie, but wasn't it her job to protect him? Why didn't she care? How could she anaesthetize herself so thoroughly that she would cast her son aside? The questions he had had for years swirled through his mind for an instant, then dissipated. None of that mattered now, he supposed.

What mattered was what happened next. What put Richie in the state he'd been in when he came ambling through Eddie's bedroom window, battered and broken down. "He looked at me and said he was giving me 10 minutes to decide. Stay, and die, or get out of their lives once and for all." It wasn't a difficult decision. He'd been a pre-teen when he k.o.'d a child killing clown, hadn't he. His sense of self preservation was way fucking better than that. Besides, there was Eddie. Whatever his parents thought would make that decision difficult was so far beyond wrong. "So, I grabbed what I could and split. Those four bags are as much of my shit as I could haul." He gestured to pile of bags stuffed into Eddie's open closet. That was all there was. Somehow, though, Richie didn't much mind that. What mattered to him, really, was the boy on his knees in front of him, who hadn't let go since he finally caught him. Finally looking at Eddie, who had kept his jaw clenched, defiantly banishing his own tears, Richie felt his resolve crumble. He leaned forward, burying his face in his hands. "I didn't know where else to go," he sobbed.

"Here," he said, kissing him tenderly and wiping the tears from Richie's face. "Here is where you belong," Eddie assured, moving up onto the bed and wrapping the taller boy tightly in his arms. He pulled his leg over Richie's, kissing him again, this time possessively, intending to show him how much he meant that.

From the kitchen came the voice of his mother, yelling her morning reminder. "Eddie, you're gonna be late!"

"Shit…" he hissed, breaking the kiss. Richie gave a disappointed groan, nipping at Eddie's lower lip in protest. Thumbing at Richie's jaw, he shot him an apologetic look before pulling away. "Coming!" he yelled back before kissing his boyfriend again, shoving him back against the pillows. "Don't move. Lie low until she leaves for work."

Eyes still red rimmed and bleary, Richie couldn't resist the easy joke Eddie had left open. He folded his arms behind his head and crossed

his feet, looking every bit like the Ferris Bueller movie poster that hung behind the headboard. "How do you know I'm not going to use my vulnerability here to my advantage and finally make my move on your mother?"

Exasperated, Eddie gave a slightly amused smile. "Because you're just as grossed out by the idea of me calling you Daddy as I am," he poked back. Richie wrinkled his nose and frowned at the decidedly uncomfortable pet name. "I'm gonna get my shift covered for today," Eddie confirmed, sliding into his shoes while bracing himself on his boyfriend's legs. "I'll be back," he said, in a horrible faux Schwarzenegger accent.

"Leave the voices to me, Eds," Richie said, laughing.

Eddie leaned forward, brushing the curls from in front of his boyfriend's eyes. "I love you," he said, gaze locked lovingly onto Richie. He could only hope that he knew just how much he meant it, his simple "I love you" standing in place of so many other things he wanted to say, and would, as soon as he got back. He closed the distance between them with a quick kiss.

A small smile played at the corners of Richie's mouth as it worked with Eddie's before replying, "I love you, too."

Opening and closing the door quickly, Eddie disappeared into the hallway and ran down the stairs. In the distance, Richie could hear the telltale buzz of the trading cards in the spokes of his bike wheels that signaled that Eddie had taken off. A few minutes after, Richie heard the front door close again and Mrs. Kaspbrak's car engine start, taking off for the potluck she went to a couple of towns over every Sunday while Eddie went to work. As he lay in bed, he thought back to the pile of bags in the closet, amused at the idea that he'd managed to strip his entire life from his childhood bedroom into four bags in ten minutes. He flipped the tv on and settled on Nickelodeon, knowing that the current musical wave of real-life stories would make him feel worse. In fact, the mere thought of coming across a song like Jeremy when he could be watching goofy cartoon babies that reminded him of a certain pack of losers sounded wildly disheartening. He laughed as the redhead with glasses had a meltdown about his big boy bed. A dangerous thought crossed his

mind. This kid was some fictional jumble of Eddie and him. He shook away the thought, but kept it tucked away for safe-keeping.

About an hour later, Eddie returned with a brown paper bag in hand. "Hey," he said, eyes landing on his boyfriend in his bed in his house and trying to ignore the reaction that got from his body.

"Welcome home," Richie replied, sitting up to make room for him. Noticing the way Eddie stood frozen at the foot of the bed, he asked a hesitant, "What?" before realizing that what he'd said, especially accompanied by his lazy, Rugrats fueled day dream, sounded far more domestic than Eddie may have been prepared for.

Eyes wide, Eddie shook his head, pleased with the entire thing. "Nothing. Nothing that was just…" something that I've wanted for a long time and still thought I had a while to wait before hearing in this setting was what he wanted to say, instead settling on "surreal."

Richie nodded, voicing a quiet "Yeah," of agreement.

Coming back into the moment, Eddie sat down on the bed between them, the bag close enough to Richie that he could, hopefully, tell it's contents without being told. "So, since it requires no saying that you need some extra TLC…"

"Eddie-"

"Don't Eddie me. Today, you get spoiled." He said, unrolling the top and pulling out white styrofoam containers full of still hot food, opening them one by one. "From Dreamers Cafe, Chocolate chip pancakes, bacon, and, for later…" he pulled a smaller bag from behind his back and dumped out half a dozen whoopie pies. Richie's face lit up like a tree on Christmas.

He leaned over their feast and kissed his boyfriend over and over. "Thank you." Of course, he meant for the food. He couldn't really bring himself to say what he wanted to. Thank you for always being at my side. Thank you for letting me climb in your window, then into your bed. Thank you for never kicking me out. Thank you for staying by my side. Thank you for caring what happens to me. Thank you for loving me. Thank you for being my Eds. "You really didn't have to-"

"I know. But you need it today," he said, finally. He kissed him one more time before flipping the lid for the bacon up and snagging a piece for himself. "And, we're going to figure out how to make this work. We'll see what else we need to figure out how to get from your parents." Richie leaned forward and kissed him again, bewildered at how the boy in front of him could manage to keep such order in their hectic young lives. "What was that for?" Eddie asked earnestly.

Richie shrugged. "For being you."

"Well, then, let's call this payment in kind," Eddie said, leaning across to kiss him one more time before resuming his snacking. He leaned back, tracing his foot up and down the inside of Richie's leg. "They're wrong. You do know that, right?" he said, after some pensieve silence.

Closing his eyes, Richie hung his head a little, deflated. He cut off a bite of pancake and speared it a little more violently than was necessary. "Babe, I don't want to talk about them right now."

That was enough for Eddie. He knew that, when he needed to talk again, he would, but for now, he was eating real food and safe and warm in his bed, not that that hadn't been the case all weekend, but that wasn't the point. "Okay," he agreed, resting his hand on his boyfriend's ankle and grabbing another piece of bacon.

They spent the day losing themselves in one another until they had forgotten where one of them ended and the other began. The only time they left each other's side was when Mrs. Kaspbrak returned. They'd been so distracted, neither had realized what time it was. Eddie yanked Richie out of bed and shoved him into his closet to a muffled, "Really, babe?" as the front door opened and heavy footsteps ascended to his room, opening the door without so much as an acknowledgement that it had been closed. Eddie spoke with his mother for a moment, then said goodnight and shut the door behind her. When he reopened the closet, Richie had the most ridiculous expression on his face, twirling out of it and kissing Eddie delicately on the cheek with a bright colored shirt in the air. "You know, there was a joke in there somewhere," he said, "but it probably would have been easier than your mom was the first time," he whispered, giving him a playful shove.

As they lay in bed that night, wrapped in each other's arms, Eddie looked up at his boyfriend to find him staring at him in a daze. "What?" he asked with a breathy laugh.

"Nothing," he answered, laughing at his own distraction. He really was wrapped around Eddie's little perfectly manicured, regularly washed finger, wasn't he.

"Richie…" Eddie groaned, trying to coax it out of him, while still remaining quiet enough that they wouldn't wake up his mother.

"Nothing. This just…" he sighed, searching for the words. He could see the concern creasing Eddie's brow and gently brushed his cheek. "It feels right. You and me against the world." Eddie leaned up to kiss him. When they parted, he added a quiet, grumbled, "Even if you did literally push me back in the closet tonight."

Cheeks tinged pink, he mouthed an exaggerated "Sorry."

Holding Eddie a little tighter, a sly smile rested on Richie's lips. "It's okay. Your mother has always been the same way." Eddie gave a little shove and rolled over in a huff. "Secretive bunch, you Kaspbraks."

He shook his head, secretly glad that he was feeling better enough to joke again. "Beep beep, Richie," he groaned, deliberately not grabbing the hand that had snaked its way around his waist. "Way to ruin the moment."

Richie buried his face in Eddie's neck and slid as close to him as he could. "Sorry, babe, it was right there." The way he continued to shake his head made the hair at the nape of Eddie's neck tickle Richie's nose. He nuzzled against him trying to get him to turn to him again.

Eventually, Eddie obliged, facing his boyfriend with only adoration. "Seriously though, I can't think of a moment where I didn't want this." He was facing Richie, their bodies pressed against one another, tracing one another's outlines with their fingertips. "Look, I know we've talked about different schools, but I don't want to go anywhere where I can't come home to you."

"To a place that's just ours. Yeah, I know," Richie said, longingly. Preferably somewhere far the fuck away from Derry."

A thought crossed Eddie's mind; a distant memory suddenly sucked to the front of his mind. "Like California?" he suggested.

"Like California," Richie affirmed. He leaned in and kissed his boyfriend for what had to have been the thousandth time that day. He couldn't help but feel a little clingy, but he knew Eddie didn't really mind clingy. In that room, they were safe. Hopefully, one day, they'd be able to be safe in more than just one room. "And the sooner the fucking better."

A life with Richie. All weekend, that had been the only thing on his mind. Getting them both somewhere they could be free. "What if we did?" he mused.

Richie clutched his chest, exaggeratedly flustered. "Don't tease me."

There wasn't even a part of Eddie that was kidding. Once he'd said it, the idea took new life and plans unfolded before him. So many plans. "Seriously, Rich. Let's at least think about it," he said, adjusting himself so that Richie could see his face, hoping he'd be able to read just how serious he was. He could see it so clearly. A little apartment in a decent neighborhood with a cool art scene for Richie and not a fucking clown in sight.

Propped up on his elbow and hovering just slightly over Eddie, he dropped his jaw playfully. "Are you asking me to run away with you?" Richie asked in an affected southern belle accent, fanning himself. "Why Eddie Kaspbrak, you cad! Whatever would your mother say?"

Rolling his eyes, knowing exactly where his comment was going to head, he said it anyway. "Fuck my mother."

"I've been telling you for-" Richie stopped when Eddie's expression didn't change. He surveyed the boy in silence for a minute, then sat up, cross legged on the bed. "You're serious?" In no time at all, the spark of joy was back in his deep brown eyes and the boys were sharing hushed whispers, bouncing excitedly as it all came together.

The nine months until they graduated were either going to be the fastest or longest of either of their lives.

California had always been an inevitability for the boys. Even when they were 7 and unaware of the deeper horrors Derry held. Just the human ones.

One morning, right before the end of their first school year, Eddie spotted his best friend on his new big boy bike out of the front window and raced out the front door after him. "Hey, Richie!" He called, racing after him at a full run, before his mother's overbearance started manifesting in psychosomatic asthma. He had asthma, according to his mom, but he didn't really feel it unless she told him it was happening. He guessed his wasn't as bad as Kenny Martin's asthma. Sometimes, he could hardly laugh without having to use his aspirator. He still couldn't quite catch up and called out again. "Richie! Wait up!" Eddie picked up speed as they headed down the hill, with Richie applying the brake to stay in control. When they reached the bottom, they were just about even. "Richie Tozier, wait!" he yelled once more, finally catching his attention.

Richie skidded to a halt, "Hi, Eddie."

Panting a little, Eddie frowned. Richie sounded sad. "Where you going?" he asked.

"California," the taller boy said

Remembering the map that hung over the desk in the front of their class, right in front of where he and Richie sat, he remembered California being on the other side of the picture from Maine. "But that's far." He scrunched up his nose, trying to imagine how long it would take. At least all night, he guessed. "Will you be back in time for school tomorrow?"

"That's the point, Spaghetti Head! I'm running away," Richie said, giving him a gentle push and starting to walk his bike toward the beach. He knew California had beaches, so it had to be the right way.

"Alone?" Eddie asked, scrambling after him.

Richie nodded firmly. "Alone."

Alone. Eddie didn't like the idea of Richie leaving alone. In fact, he didn't like anything about the word alone. "That sounds scary," he said quietly, swallowing loudly. He fumbled with his fanny pack, checking his supplies, finding it fully stocked. "D'you want me to come with you? In case you fall?" he offered. "I have Band-Aids and Neosporin and allergy medicine and tweezers and an inhaler. It might help in case you get hurt." He knew his friend was clumsy and didn't want him to get an infection. His mom always told him that every cut could get infected and if he were to fall in the mud like they did all the time...

"Do you even know how to use any of that?" Richie asked, interrupting his thoughts.

Nodding like it was the most obvious thing in the world, Eddie answered a chirpy "Yeah."

For about a minute, the boys walked in silence. Eddie thought it was weird. This wasn't the Richie he knew. It was like he'd been abducted, like that old black and white Invasion Of The Body Snatchers movie they'd watched at Stan's over Christmas when they slept over. A Richie Tozier that didn't feel like talking was a weird Richie Tozier. Eddie resolved to stay with his friend until he was back to normal. As normal as Richie could ever be, that was.

The silence was the thing that undid Richie after all. He thought maybe it would chase Eddie off, but it seemed to make him more likely to stay. "Fine. You can run away with me," he said, a little annoyed.

"Good. I wouldn't have anyone to sit with tomorrow," the shorter boy admitted happily. He liked spending time with Richie.

Looking over at his travel companion, he groaned. "You talk a lot."

"So do you," he countered, earning a look from Richie that made him look a little like a bug with how wide his eyes were under his thick glasses. Eddie rolled his eyes, knowing what Richie meant. "Most of the time, anyways."

"You don't need to complensplate for me," he said.

Eddie screwed up his face, realizing Richie had used a word he didn't know. That didn't happen often, but he still had to ask. "Complensplate?"

"Make up for stuff I don't have," he answered, a smug little grin crossed his face for a moment before finally falling back to the sadness he'd been wearing before. "My mommy says that's why my daddy's a bully."

Bullies were something Eddie knew well enough. That was what brought him to Richie in the first place. Some older boys were teasing him for not having any friends and Richie sat down right next to him and draped his arm over his shoulder dramatically, telling them he was his best friend and that was like having ten best friends because he was that awesome. All year, Eddie had thought that maybe he was right and one Richie was worth ten of anyone else. That's why it was so confusing to hear that. "Your daddy's a bully?" he asked, genuinely confused. From what he remembered of his daddy, that's not what daddys where supposed to be.

He tightened his grip on the handlebars and nodded. "Mhm. My mommy says it's 'cause he doesn't have enough balls."

Richie wasn't making a whole lot of sense to Eddie anymore. "Like soccer balls?" he asked, wondering why anyone would need more than one of any type of ball. Except the little glow in the dark super bouncy ones that come from the quarter machines at the grocery store. Those he could have a million of.

He shrugged. Truthfully, nothing his mom said that night made a lot of sense. She had said that he was a dog and a donkey and that he had to go to the bathroom, but Richie really didn't know what that had to do with anything, so he didn't bother saying it to Eddie. "I think so. I saw a really cool basketball at Freese's that had the Roadrunner on it and I thought maybe he might like that one and it would help him so I was gonna save up and buy it for him for his birthday but I think now I'm gonna need all the money I got." He looked down at his feet.

"Probably," Eddie agreed. The pair hardly reached the quarry before they got turned around and wound up back on their street. When they showed up at Richie's front door, Mrs. Tozier brought both boys inside and called Eddie's mom, saying that he had fallen asleep on their couch and that everything was okay, she just wanted to make sure that she knew where he was. From next to Richie, Eddie smiled up at her, then at his friend, bringing their halves of peanut butter and jelly sandwich together in a secret toast.

Whenever Eddie felt himself growing angry with his boyfriend's mother in their senior year, he remembered that night. When she'd grabbed him at work, he'd almost taken a swing, offended that she would even bother to ask how Richie was. Of course, she knew where he was. Of course, she could have been better to him. Somehow, though, she had never called or stopped at the house. Maybe, just maybe, she didn't spark his being thrown out maliciously. Maybe, on some level, she knew he'd be okay. After the 6th time it happened, it dawned on Eddie. It was her fucked up way of saving her son. He softened to her after that, even once spending his whole break with her. She may have been a shitty mother, but she was in a shitty situation, too, and she did what had to be done to make sure her son was safe. Richie would always be safe with Eddie.

The last month of their senior year saw the three remaining Losers slowly moving anything Richie and Eddie would want to take with them out into the Clubhouse. They had saved up all of their money all year and had enough to get themselves going. They had spent a little of it on an old junk car that would probably only make it as far as they needed and then crap out, but the rest was on tight reserve. The boys also knew that if they were going to make it out without Eddie's mother realizing, they'd have to do it from someplace that wasn't the house.

When the time came for Richie and Eddie to say goodbye to Mike, a week after graduation, no one really knew what to say. How were they supposed to close out the Derry chapter of their life?

Richie put the last of their stuff into the back seat, closed the door, and leaned across the roof of the car. "You ready to blow this demon infested popsicle stand?"

"You sure you won't come with us?" Eddie asked, turning to Mike with tears stuck in his eyes. He felt so guilty leaving him alone. Still, every time they suggested it, he adamantly rejected their offers. Nevertheless, one more time wasn't going to kill anyone.

Mike shook his head and leaned back against the car, fists dug deep in his pockets. "Nah. Someone's gotta man the battlements."

Not wanting what could possibly, by the way things had happened when all of the other losers left, be the last time they spoke to be a fight, Eddie simply stated "No, they really don't, Mike."

That whole line of thinking drove Richie up the fucking wall. It was over. There was no reason to keep looking for danger that wasn't going to come. "Man, you gotta get the fuck out of here," he groaned. Life had moved on for them, but Derry didn't usually do the same.

"Do you honestly want some mopey third wheel for your fresh start?" Mike questioned. He still missed the rest of the losers, possibly even more than Eddie and Richie did. He bristled every time they mentioned Bill and Richie had tried not to recognize why. They'd never talked about it. Talking about it in Derry was dangerous. Maybe if he'd come with them, they'd talk about it.

"We're used to our mopey third wheel," Eddie joked.

Richie leaned back on the trunk next to their old friend with his arms crossed tightly. "Tricycles have three wheels and function quite well, Micycle."

"Honestly?" Mike started, looking between the two of them. "I don't think I could handle the endless cycle of bickering in isolation."

"We don't bicker," Richie guffawed in mock offense.

Eddie joined in the outrage. "Only when he's being an asshole," he supplied, earning a roll of their friend's eyes in response

"I'm not an asshole!" Richie protested.

Pursing his lips, the shortest of the three released a laugh that was more air than tone. "Except when you breathe," he snarked.

In a biting reply, Richie volleyed back, "At least I don't need an inhaler to do it."

"Neither do I, fucker," Eddie said, shoving Richie gently and wishing he could kiss him right then. Still, they had decided that, after not telling mike yet, to do it just as they were leaving was mean. They never wanted any of the Losers to feel left out.

Richie laughed loudly. "Yeah, thanks to me." He knew that was over simplifying it, but that was his story. He had single handedly undone all of Mrs. Kaspbrak's helicopter mothering and would shout it from every rooftop if he had to.

Finally agreeing on it with an exaggerated sigh, Eddie added a tired "Thanks to you." When Ricie looked a little too proud of himself, and he was struggling more not to kiss his stupid smug face, Eddie added a tortured, "Fine, whatever." He shoved Richie to the side and hugged Mike tightly. "We'll call when we get there," he said, wherever there wound up being, that was. They still hadn't really decided yet.

With a sad, knowing glint in his eyes, Mike replied with a low, "Don't forget." He couldn't shake the sinking suspicion that that was why everyone else had fallen off the face of the Earth; they'd forgotten.

"We won't," Eddie assured. His words rang in his ears, echoing with the promises each of their friends had made before leaving, knowing that none of them had followed through. That wouldn't be them, though. They were older. Eddie was certainly more responsible. Rich… well, Eddie would be there to keep him in check.

Crashing into Mike, Richie gave him a big hug. He really didn't want to leave Mike there alone. Soon, Eddie was throwing himself in between the two taller guys.

After a couple emotionally charged minutes, they finally broke apart. Richie sniffed, pushing Mike back. "Later, Loser!" He got in the car and rolled down the windows.

"Later!" Mike called, finally releasing Eddie from his arms and mussing his hair fondly.

When both men were buckled in, Richie took Eddie's hand in his and kissed it. "You ready, Eddie Spaghetti, my steady?"

"You're the worst." Eddie groaned with a laugh. One more quick look behind him and he nodded, "Let's go."

Dropping Eddie's hand onto his leg, he started to focus on pulling out of the dirt road. "I just have one thing to show you first."

Sliding his hand along the inside of his boyfriend's thigh, he laughed a little. "I've already seen it," he said, voice daringly low. Richie started to panic. He had… How could he? How did he know? When his hand met the apex of Richie's legs, he started to relax. Eddie hadn't seen. He was just excited. Still, he continued his ministrations. "And as much as I appreciate the offer, we can wait until we stop for the night for that."

Eddie's hand stopped, thumbing the outline of Richie in his thin blue sweatpants. "Not…" he stumbled, trying to force his stupid brain to find words. "Not that, asshole. Jesus Christ," he hissed, "I mean it. There's just something I want to show you on the way out of town."

They drove through Derry hand in hand, both a little anxious, realizing that, with any luck, this was the last they'd see of that soul sucking town. When the car slowed to a halt on the kissing bridge, Eddie was more than a little confused. They'd never been out there together. Then, as if drawn to it, his eyes settled on a small set of initials. RE. "Richie…" he said gently, running his fingers over the engraving. "When?"

"That summer." Eddie knew which summer. Of course he did. It was the only summer of their lives he could be so vague about and still get his point across. The summer of 1989. "I had a run-in with Pantydumb the Fucking Shitstorm and I, uh," he trailed off, rubbing at his hands and walking to his boyfriend, wrapping his arms around him from behind. "I just needed to do it. I needed to see it in front of my face." Eddie dashed back to the car, shuffling his hand between the seats and then grunting as he stretched for the glove box. "What are you doing?" Richie asked, leaning back against the rail, eyes never once fleeting from his boyfriend's ass.

"How do you not have a pen or pencil in your car?" he asked, rustling a sheet of paper over his shoulder demonstratively.

Richie was lost. What could Eddie possibly have to write? "Huh?"

"Something to write with, Richie," he replied, sounding like he definitely meant to say call him an idiot instead.

Adjusting his glasses on his nose, he shrugged. "I packed some stuff in my backpack. There might still be one in the front pocket." He still didn't really get what Eddie wanted it for, but far be it from him to question his motives.

With a triumphant little hmph, Eddie pulled himself back out of the car and smiled at Richie, waving the blunted pencil happily. He knelt by the railing and traced the tip quickly back and forth over the paper. Standing, he revealed the impression to Richie with a sweet smile. "We fell in love here. A reminder that, maybe, Derry wasn't all bad."

"Sap." Richie teased, pawing at the faintest hint of wetness brimming under his glasses. They were so out of here. He pulled a scrap of paper from the glovebox and handed it to Eddie. "Make me one, too?"

When he'd finished the second impression, he handed it off to Richie with a kiss. "I love you," he said, watching him carefully fold the note and stuff it in his wallet.

"I love you. I always have," he said, sliding his hand into Eddie's hair and pulling him back into a kiss. They got back in the car and drove for a short while. When they reached the sign that read "Now Leaving Derry," Richie applied the brakes, then burnt rubber as one last goodbye, leaving the town in a literal cloud of dust. "And they're outta here," he yelled like a baseball announcer, eliciting a laugh from Eddie at the new impression.

As the sun began to set somewhere in upstate New York, Eddie looked over at the boy in the driver's who'd built a home in his heart. Now, they were off to build one wherever they desired.